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## Despite tough times, Downey Adult School forging ahead

by Henry Veneracion, Staff Writer

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DOWNEY – Because of the tough economic times, some adult schools in the southland have crashed and burned. Others, particularly the Downey Adult School (DAS) Career and Education Center, thrive. Why?

Roger Brossmer, who came aboard in 2003 and became adult school principal in 2005, offers the following reasons for the school's success: excellent programs, hard-hitting management, fiscal acumen, updated technology There is

more, but these are the most important, he said.

When a news item reported that adult education classes at the Escondido Adult School "are 'bursting' as the unemployed and underemployed are trying to better themselves by learning new skills," Brossmer said exactly the same thing is happening here in Downey.

A new wrinkle has also developed as people get laid off: they can't get re-employed without a diploma (before, they could). Another consequence of this: employers can get picky.

Thus, high school/GED classes are conducted during the day, the evening and on the weekend—with 362 people enrolled, with a large increase in men.

If this doesn't impress you, perhaps the following programs (as described and summarized for the most part by Brossmer) which enjoy the biggest demand, will:

- Vocational Nursing – two programs a year are now offered: for each class DAS tests over 600 applicants to fill just 30 spots.

- Medical Assistant (also a very popular class in Escondido) – now offer three classes, morning, afternoon, and evening: all classes are full, while 41 students attended the last orientation. (A similar phenomenon is happening in the case of Pharmacy Technician, Medical Biller Coder, and Dental Assistant (a new program, and full)).

- Court Reporting – the program has doubled in size over the past two years

- ESL – classes are full, with close to 800 students enrolled; waiting lists for most levels.

- Computer Office Skills – day, evening and Saturday classes offered, to phase out Windows 2007 and offer Office 2010 in the fall; to stay on the 'cutting edge' of technology.

"To give even more flexibility to our students," Brossmer noted, "DAS has expanded our online options."

Because the district's priority is to apply its education funds to its K-12 program, DAS' basic source of funding (its \$6 million allocation) is vulnerable, especially as the economic crisis lengthens and deepens.

The school's course of action? Raise fees.

Where before, ESL and high school diploma/GED were offered free of charge, now it costs the

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student \$45; Medical Assistant and Pharmacy Technician courses now cost \$1,595, while Vocational Nursing now commands \$5,995. Still, as compared to prices charged by private schools, DAS' offerings are a bargain (Brossmer says most vocational nursing programs charge between \$25,000 and \$30,000). The quality is the same, even higher here in some cases, he says.

This begs the question, "Why do students pay these huge amounts?" The number one reason, of course, is the classical "imperfect information" (to offset this, DAS has engaged in aggressive promotion: thus it has its brochure, mail and online promo, print ads, signage).

DAS emphasized it also has several financial aid programs to help students, federal Pell grants foremost among them. It also has begun partnering with the Downey Federal Credit Union, to provide loans to students.

The bottom line in all this, Brossmer said, is: "Our product offering is topnotch, adjudged the fastest growing, as well as the 15th largest, adult school in the state. Despite fee increases, attendance is up. Whether it will fall victim to draconian state budget cuts down the road, is beyond our control."

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| Sun         | Mon         | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | : |
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